

# Sea Service Chaplains Respond to the Attack on America



USCG photo by PA2 Tom Spurduto

*Chaplains Michael Doyle and Peter Larsen  
await rescue workers emerging from the rubble at Ground Zero.*

Special Edition

December 2001

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CHIEF OF CHAPLAINS  
Office of the Chief of Naval Operations  
Washington, D.C. 20350-2000

Dear Colleagues in Ministry,

The tragic events of September 11<sup>th</sup> have received unprecedented media coverage. Journalists have related many stories of heroism and honor by those who responded to the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon. In this special edition of *The Navy Chaplain*, we "tell the story" of some of our own. As you will see, Navy chaplains and Religious Program Specialists were among the first to respond to the "Attack on America." I hope the story of their remarkable ministry in these difficult times inspires you and heightens your pride in our Corps.

Chaplain Barry Crane has done an outstanding job in his overview of our Corps' response. Chaplain Wilbur Douglass, leader of the Chaplain Emergency Response Team (CERT), tells of the teamwork of Coast Guard chaplains who provided ministry in a changing paradigm. Cooperating among themselves and with the many civilian organizations in New York City, they exemplified the goal of Priority Two of our Strategic Plan. Chaplains Jane Vieira and Brad Telleen report their ministry experiences at the other terrorist target site in the Washington D.C. area. Chaplain David Glassmire talks about the chaplain response for Casualty Assistance Calls support for Naval District Washington. And finally, Chaplain Sal Aguilera writes of the ministry provided by those aboard USNS COMFORT.

For many of us, this issue of *The Navy Chaplain* will be a "keeper." The stories will inspire you and the "Lessons Learned" will instruct you as you equip yourself for the possibility of ministry amid the unimaginable.

In God's service and yours,



Special Edition

*The Navy Chaplain*  
A Publication of the Chief of Chaplains  
United States Navy  
Editor: LCDR Walt East, CHC, USN



December 2001

*The Navy Chaplain* is published bimonthly for the Chief of Chaplains by the Chaplain Resource Branch, 9591 Maryland Avenue, Norfolk, VA 23511-2993. The purpose of *The Navy Chaplain* is to enhance ministry by providing timely information to Active Duty, Reserve and Retired chaplains, Active and Reserve Religious Program Specialists, and Chaplain Candidate Program Officers. This newsletter is provided as a service to Navy Chaplains and Religious Program Specialists by the Navy Chief of Chaplains, Chaplain Resource Branch. Resources not identified as official government documents **do not** represent the official policies of the United States Navy Chaplain Corps or the Department of the Navy, but are intended for the training and education of Chaplains and Religious Program Specialists. Submissions to *The Navy Chaplain* must arrive by the first of the month preceding publication, and may be sent via E-mail to [tnc@crb.chaplain.navy.mil](mailto:tnc@crb.chaplain.navy.mil). Pictures to accompany the articles are strongly encouraged.

## *Navy Chaplains and RPs Respond to the Attack on America*

by CDR Barry Crane, CHC, USNR



### **Under Attack**

United States Navy Chaplain Greg Todd climbed into the small USCG Auxiliary aircraft for the two-hour flight to USCG AIR STATION CAPE COD. It was a beautiful day on the Mid-Atlantic coast. The skies were partly cloudy and the temperature was on its way up to 80 degrees. The plane lifted off the runway at Caldwell, New Jersey, and banked to cross the Hudson River.

Shortly after takeoff, the copilot looked over his right shoulder and said, "That looks odd. Something's going on at the World Trade Center." A plume of smoke was rising from one of the towers. Concerned, they tuned in a commercial radio station and discovered that a plane had hit one of the towers.

Soon word came that the second tower was also hit. New York City was experiencing a terrorist attack. The Coast Guard aircraft diverted to New Bedford, Massachusetts, and before long were notified that all airplanes were grounded.

At the same time, two hundred miles to the south in Washington, Deputy Chief of Chaplains Louis Iasiello was called into the Chief of Chaplains office, where a television was tuned to a news station. Those who had gathered watched in horror as a second airplane hit the World Trade Center, and then they turned off the TV and prayed together for the country. Moments later, the whine of jet engines



(AP/Wideworld Photos)

was heard overhead. Chaplain Iasiello thought that perhaps an aircraft was rendering military honors at Arlington Cemetery next door. He remarked, "Wow, those jets are close ... they must be Marine aviators!" Seconds later there was the sound of a huge explosion. Alarms went off and the Navy Annex was evacuated. America was under attack.

Out in the Pacific Ocean, somewhere off the Northwest coast, the Chief of Chaplains, Rear Admiral Barry Black, and his Senior Enlisted Advisor, RPCM Larry Darnell, were being hosted by Chaplain Phil Wyrick on a three-day orientation cruise aboard a "boomer," a ballistic missile submarine, based in Bangor, Washington. Shortly after the attacks, the submarine went on alert. There would be no telling when the Chief of Chaplains would return to Washington, D.C.

The Navy Chaplain Corps' vision statement—"Devoted to God and country, we unite to deliver innovative, life transforming service throughout and beyond the Sea Services"—was about to be tested.

### **The Response Begins: New York City**

Three Navy chaplains were in the New York City area when the attacks occurred. CDR Wilbur "Doug" Douglass, the LANT AREA chaplain for the USCG, was at La Guardia Airport awaiting a flight to Providence. He was on his way to the District 1 Training Meeting in Cape Cod. Chaplain Karl Lindblad was at King's Point in nearby Nassau County, at the United States Merchant Marine

(AP/Wideworld Photos)





Academy. Chaplain Tom Hall, who is assigned with the USCG in Puerto Rico, was in Manhattan at a meeting of the Paulist Fathers at the time of the crisis.

Doug Douglass made his way to USCG ACTIVITIES NEW YORK, located on Staten Island, and a Chaplain Emergency Response Team was set up at the base chapel. Karl Lindblad was immediately involved in responding to the attack, particularly because of a close relationship with the New York City Police Department. Karl spent time in counseling and prayer. He celebrated Mass and moved alongside the NYPD in support. Tom Hall volunteered to serve the night shift at the morgue and at the family assistance center that was set up in a nearby National Guard armory. Over 7,000 family members filed missing persons reports at that site during the first 72 hours of rescue and recovery.

Chaplain Greg Todd, now on the ground in New Bedford, contacted Chaplain Denny Boyle of AIR STATION CAPE COD. Denny picked Greg up, along with the pilots of the now grounded airplane, and they also headed immediately to USCG ACTIVITIES NEW YORK. When these chaplains arrived at the Goethels Bridge to Staten Island, they found it closed to traffic. Chaplain Todd talked to the police officer at the roadblock. When he saw Greg was a chaplain, the officer responded, "We're glad you're here," and waved them through. It was to be the first of many times our chaplains would be greeted with similar words.

The day after the attack, Chaplain Todd went out on a USCG cutter to minister to the Coasties who had responded. The cutter was anchored just off the Manhattan site of the World Trade Center. He and the Executive Officer of the cutter went down to Ground Zero. According to Chaplain Todd, "It was like something out of *Saving Private Ryan*. There were just hundreds and hundreds of firefighters going in and coming out. The need for a chaplain became obvious. In fact, the thought went through my head, 'We could use hundreds of chaplains.'" Meanwhile, Chaplain Douglass made contact with the American Red Cross. Considering the specialized training of Navy chaplains serving with the Coast Guard, the Red Cross wanted them at Ground Zero and the Disaster Mortuary. They would also be serving the many USCG units that were called in from other areas to defend the port of New York. Additional USCG chaplains within driving distance were called in to assist.



*RDML Darold Bigger, Deputy Chief of Chaplains for Total Force, (center) speaks with New York Port Security personnel.*

### ***The Response Begins: Washington, D.C.***

Rear Admiral Darold Bigger, Deputy Chief of Chaplains for Total Force, was in the Navy Annex at the time of the terrorist attack. He was on his last day of ADT orders and was preparing to head home the next day. After evacuating the Navy Annex, Chaplain Bigger and other Navy chaplains went down to the Pentagon to assist. They initially ministered to the injured. The fire raged out of control and the chaplains realized they would be needed for some time to come. They organized watches through the night and into the next morning. Chaplain Bigger returned to his office in the early hours of the morning for an hour and a half of sleep.

When he awoke at 0500, the first of many Naval Reserve chaplains who would support the ministry effort had already arrived. In strong affirmation of the quick response of Reserve chaplains, Chaplain Bigger commented, "In less than 24 hours, all the order writing process was over and these people were on site. It was a wonderful demonstration of how the Chaplain Corps and the Naval Reserve are willing and able to respond in a crisis."

A complex organization of chaplain assignments was developed on September 12<sup>th</sup>. Some would provide ministry to people working at the crash site itself. Others would minister to the victims' families at the Joint Family Assistance Center. Some would soon be on their way to Dover AFB in Delaware, where the remains of those who were killed at the Pentagon were taken. Some served in the Navy Annex and others worked with CACO officers to support families whose loved ones were missing. In all, nearly 100 Navy chaplains and RPs (including some 30 Reservists) were involved in Operation

Noble Eagle, the military response to the terrorist attacks.

### **Chaplain Ministry Vignettes: New York**

As days went by, the role of Navy chaplains began to grow. Ground Zero continued to be a place of grief and fatigue for rescuers, police, firefighters, members of the FBI, and construction workers. Disaster Mortuary (DMORT) personnel faced the grim task of identifying remains. The operational tempo of USCG units began to wear on the crews of the cutters and Port Security Units that had been called in.

### **With the Mayor at Ground Zero**

In an effort to help families cope with the tragedy, New York City began ferrying 50-75 family members at a time from the Family Assistance Center on Pier 94 on the Hudson River, down to Ground Zero at the World Trade Center, so they could see where their loved ones died. The families then walked from the pier to a viewing platform overlooking the devastation. They remained for about 15 minutes. Out of respect, many of the workers stopped what they were doing. On the way back, the families passed by a makeshift memorial where they laid flowers, teddy bears, or personal notes. Chaplain Jim Jenkins, a Naval Reserve chaplain from Cottage Grove, Oregon, was on the first ferry to make this trip and he comments on his experience:

*Mayor Giuliani traveled with about 50 family members. I was in awe of his leadership and his compassion. When we got to Ground Zero, the family members were appalled. Some screamed; others got sick. One man, however, turned his anger on the mayor. "You knew about this. You could have stopped it! My only son is dead, and it's your fault!"*

*With pain etched on his face worthy of Greek tragedy, I watched the mayor just absorb this man's pain and rage. After railing at the mayor for a few minutes, the man began to heave huge sobs and appeared to totter. I grabbed one arm, and the mayor grabbed the other. There we were, patting the man's chest and saying, "I am so sorry for your loss." It was a surreal moment. Later the mayor grabbed my arm, and said "Thank you for being here." I thought, "I'm just the one who happened to be there. Any one of our Coast Guard Chaplains would have done the same."*

### **Aboard the USNS COMFORT (T-AH 20)**

Chaplain Salvador Aguilera and his colleague

Chaplain David Stroud normally serve at the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland. However, in time of crisis, their billets call for them to report to the hospital ship USNS COMFORT. When she left her berth in Baltimore, it appeared the COMFORT would be using her facilities to augment medical care in New York City. However, by the time COMFORT arrived, her mission had changed, and she became a hotel and support complex for hundreds of those who were working at Ground Zero. Chaplains Aguilera and Stroud quickly adapted to their new environment with effective ministry: first to the crew and then to the many who were accessing the ship. Ministry also moved beyond the ship itself. Sal tells of his experience at the Disaster Mortuary:

*I was asked to assist in the morgue in blessing the remains of the dead. After the evening prayer at 2200, I would make my way to the end of the pier and a car would be waiting there to take me to Ground Zero. Because many of the firefighters and police asked for a blessing before leaving the morgue and returning to the rescue site, this also became a part of my ministry. I was repeatedly humbled at the depth of the faith and commitment of the firefighters and police and other rescue workers.*

Chaplains Aguilera and Stroud accomplished "ministry of presence" in a particularly powerful way. Commander Bess Harrahill, executive officer of the medical treatment facility, remarked, "When they walk into a room, I can sense some peace in the midst of all this chaos. It reminds me that there is something out there bigger than all of us."

### **Aboard the United States Coast Guard Cutter KATHERINE WALKER**

"The greatest ministry of my entire life," is how



USCG photo by PA3 Robert Lanter

Naval Reserve Chaplain Endel Lee described his time at Ground Zero of the World Trade Center and aboard ship with the men and women of the USCG. In civilian life, Chaplain Lee is Assistant Professor of Preaching and Pastoral Ministries at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

The primary military response to the tragedy in New York City came through the rapid deployment of the U. S. Coast Guard. They closed off the harbor, provided security, checked out shipping, and assisted at Ground Zero. Cutters from across the Mid-Atlantic and Northeast were deployed to the waters off Manhattan. The need for chaplain ministry aboard these vessels was great and chaplains responded by providing divine services, ministry of presence, and counseling. Chaplain Lee tells of an event one Sunday morning aboard a cutter:

*When I arrived on station and passed through the PSU security, things appeared quiet. I decided first to visit USCGC KATHERINE WALKER. As I approached the ship, I realized that only a skeleton crew would be aboard. I crossed the gangplank and, as is our custom, I turned toward the stern to render a salute. While turning, my eyes caught on the horizon the NYC skyline—still smoking, the twin towers obviously missing. I saluted the national ensign with a sense of pain, and came aboard.*

*Next, I made my way toward the bridge of the ship where I located one of the crew members on watch, a petty officer. As we got acquainted, I learned that he had been on the deck of this ship, which was berthed in about the same place on September 11th. He told about how he had heard the sound of the first plane crashing into the towers and actually saw the second plane strike. He began to tell of the initial confusion and how his ship got underway immediately to respond and became one of the first assets on scene. Within just a few minutes of conversation, I realized that my slow, causal Sunday morning was suddenly transformed into a significant pastoral defusing for this young man. I*

*encouraged him to go on and prompted him with questions that would help him tell his story and release some of his emotion. We talked about his involvement as he ran from Battery Park up to the location now called “Ground Zero.” He tried to describe what he saw and what he did to help. We talked about how he was processing his exposure to the devastation, and the conversation concluded as I suggested that he continue to reach out for support in dealing with the effects of this event on his personal life and his daily duties. The intensity of the conversation made time seem to both pass quickly and stand still.*

*As the conversation concluded and I made my way back toward the brow, I paused and saluted the national ensign with great vigor and a soul satisfaction that this was a place where God wanted a chaplain to do his duty. Suddenly, I knew I had just shared as a participant in a divine appointment. I stepped a bit quicker toward the next cutter on my list, hoping that God would empower me to arrive there in time to care for those in need at that location.*

### **We’re Really Glad You’re Here...**

As days moved into weeks, it became apparent that the chaplains who initially responded to the attack would need to be rotated out. Chaplain Doug Waite, Deputy Chaplain of the Coast Guard, coordinated Reserve chaplains and an RP who were called in to assist. Other active duty chaplains were brought in to serve as well. The hours were long, but the work was rewarding. Chaplain Doug Douglass, the leader of the Chaplain Emergency Response Team, comments on just how rewarding the work really was.

*We were walking through one of the areas right by Ground Zero. Two firemen were leaving the scene. They looked at me with the sort of look like more than just “hello” and so I stopped and started speaking to them. Before I could say too much, the*



*Chaplain Brian Haley speaks with a worker at Ground Zero.*



first fireman said to me, "How are you holding out?" And I said, "I'm doing well, I just would really like to know how you all are doing?" And he said, "We're hanging in there." And then they wanted to carry on a conversation. The conversation was brief, but it led to them saying, "We're really glad you're here," speaking about the chaplains. "We're really glad you all are here." And I said, "We're here to do what we can for you." And without me even realizing, he just reached over and gave me a big hug which was symbolic of how they felt about the chaplains all round. And wherever we went, that was the sort of response we were receiving...

### **Chaplain Ministry Vignettes:**

#### **Washington, D.C.**

##### **Casualty Assistance Calls**

Captain Bruce Kahn is a Rabbi in the Metropolitan Washington area. He is also a Reserve chaplain. When Chaplain Kahn heard what had happened in New York and at the Pentagon, he went immediately to Bethesda's National Naval Medical Center. He assumed the wounded would be coming there, and that would be the place for the chaplain. However, by 1900, it became apparent that the wounded would not be brought there, so he returned home. Three hours later, the Rabbi got a call from the Chief of Chaplains Office to hurry over to the Annex. He was being placed on active duty and was needed for a CACO team immediately. Naval District Washington (NDW) had responsibility for CACO calls. NDW Command Chaplain Gene Theriot coordinated the assignment of chaplains to the CACO teams, supported by Naval Reserve chaplain David Glassmire. CACO teams made 46 calls that night to officially inform families their loved one was dead or missing. Chaplain Kahn joined a CACO officer and a command representative, and headed to Northern Virginia for the first of many visits with one of these families. He describes his ministry:

*We worked with this family day and night and became extremely fond of and close to them. I will never forget the strength of these people and especially how they used their love for one another*

*and for God to help them through the horrors they faced. It was they who inspired us, the CACO team assigned to assist them.*

*Then the word came from Dover that the body of their loved one had been positively identified. My cell phone's vibrating feature went off in the middle of Rosh Hashanah morning services. It was time to go make the notification. The CACO team gathered and talked over exactly who would say and do what. Together we went sorrowfully to the family home to make the notification and pray with the wonderful souls gathered there. The family then planned a memorial service at their church, with a tremendously supportive congregation and pastor.*

#### **At the Pentagon Crash Site**

An aerial photograph of the damaged Pentagon captures the chaos where the airliner flew into the west wall. About 100 yards from the damage, two



green tents were set up as a makeshift chapel and chaplains' office. In a joint ministry setting coordinated by the Army, chaplains of all services worked 12-hour shifts to support the workers at the Pentagon site. Some chaplains worked with search and rescue teams, while others assisted the FBI. Chaplains rotated through the temporary mortuary that had been set up on the site. When remains were found, a Catholic priest would give a blessing and a Protestant or Jewish chaplain would pray as well, for the religion of the deceased was unknown.

In the days immediately following the attack, BUMED Chaplain Jane Vieira found her place of ministry at the Pentagon. Chaplain Vieira served

with the team that recovered human remains from the wreckage. One chaplain was with the team in the wreckage, a second stood at the entrance to the refrigerated truck where the remains would be stored and a third chaplain was inside the trailer itself. Chaplain Vieira shares her experience there:

*My post was inside the reefer truck as one of six team members—a doctor, a nurse, an EMT, two stretcher bearers, and myself, as chaplain. The doctor opened each body bag, examined the remains, and made the death pronouncement. We tried to bring as much honor and dignity to the dead as possible, and treated each of the remains as sacred.*

### **The Joint Family Assistance Center**

Shortly after the attack on the Pentagon, a Joint Family Assistance Center (JFAC) was established at the Sheraton Hotel in Crystal City. Rooms were set aside for family members who would be arriving from out of town. Government and private sector services were set up to meet the needs of family members who lost loved ones. Victims' families from the Washington area commuted to the daily briefings at 1000 and 1600. Army Lieutenant General John Van Alstyne was in charge of looking after the families. In his briefing sessions he would give informational updates and answer questions. Chaplains were an important part of the services provided there.

Chaplain Brad Telleen was involved as a member of a CACO team and later volunteered to serve at the JFAC. He shares that the ballroom was one of the most emotionally moving areas of the center for him.

*Along the ballroom walls, memorial tables had been set up with family pictures of those who had lost their lives, poems of love and tributes from spouses and children, along with personal items whose special meaning was known only to the family. So many lives cut short! To look at the pictures and to read the words of love and admiration placed on display was a truly humbling experience.*

### **The Armed Forces Mortuary in Dover, Delaware**

One of the missions undertaken by priests in the Roman Catholic Church is the education of young people. That is the calling of Bill McCandless, a high school teacher in Wilmington, Delaware. When teacher Bill McCandless heard about the attacks at

the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, he laid out his uniforms in preparation to serve as Chaplain William McCandless, United States Naval Reserve, because, in his words, "You never know if you are going to get called up." In his case, the call came at 2030 in the evening of 11 September. He got his things together and headed for Washington, where he reported to the Chief of Chaplains Office the next morning at 0600. He was immediately put to work at the crash site and then at the Navy Annex. A few days later, he and another Reserve chaplain, Carter Bearden, were asked to go to the Armed Forces mortuary at Dover AFB where the remains from the Pentagon were being identified and prepared for burial.

Working in Dover was not easy. Bill relates the experience of how

*...upon arriving, we were immediately taken into the morgue ... taken to the different forensics areas*



*where the teams were working on the remains—identification and what-not ... our main task at that point was to simply provide pastoral care to not only the forensic teams, but to the FBI and Naval Intelli-*



*gence people who were there doing their work as a part of the investigation. So we provided pastoral care and support to them, listening to their stories. Needless to say, it was a very traumatic experience for many people, myself and the other chaplain included.*

Soon the bodies were released for burial. In keeping with military tradition, a military escort accompanied the body on its journey home to its final resting place. Usually, the honor of this duty falls to a member of the same command as the deceased, who accompanies the remains. Chaplain McCandless remembers his ministry to a Lieutenant Junior Grade who came to Dover to accompany the body of a young petty officer. The "J.G." was only a few feet away from this young person when he was killed. Now her job was to escort the body back to Kentucky for burial. The chaplain was there for her support.

### **At the Navy Annex**

The Navy Annex is situated about a half mile from the Pentagon. It houses a portion of the Naval Personnel Command and is home to Headquarters, Marine Corps. It is also where the offices of the Chief of Chaplains are located. A relatively recent arrival in this complex of buildings has been the Ballistic Missile Defense Organization (BMDO), a group with very high security, tasked with developing for the United States the missile defense system, sometimes called "Star Wars." With the terrible damage to the Pentagon, the population of the Annex immediately swelled as entire staff sections moved out of their damaged Pentagon offices up to the Annex to share space.

Captain Larry Cripps is another Reserve chaplain who received a call on the evening of 11 September. Like his colleagues, he quickly packed his bags

at his home in High Point, North Carolina, and headed to Washington. He arrived at the outskirts of the city in the middle of the night and rested until morning when he reported to the Chief's office at 0530.

Chaplain Cripps was one of those Reservists who worked in a number of areas, but he had a specialized ministry to the personnel of the Navy Annex. After getting the necessary security clearance for BMDO, he was given access to the facility and began ministering to these folks. His service in-

cluded Critical Incident Stress Debriefings and follow up counseling sessions. He spent the better part of a morning with members of a flag staff who were in the Pentagon at the time of the attack.

Personal faith has been an important resource from which Chaplain Cripps has been able to share. He says it helps,

*...to use my own faith, my own personal faith as a foundation in looking at such tragedies of this nature ... so that I can provide better leadership and be a greater influence in helping people to get through this ... to*

*walk through this process of grief with them and hopefully get them on the other side if they can make the turn and feel like they have a handle on their grief and again get on with their lives.*

### **Around the World**

Navy chaplains around the world have ministered in the aftermath of this tragedy, bringing words of hope and encouragement to their communities. Chaplain John Geinzer, stationed at Naval Support Activity La Maddalena, happened to be aboard USS EMORY S. LAND (AS 39), in Gaeta, Italy, on 11 September. That evening, he and the ship's chaplains held an interfaith prayer service for a full chapel of shipmates.



At the Naval Station in Yokosuka, Japan, a memorial service was held on 17 September to honor those who were injured and those who lost their lives. Chaplain William Waun encouraged the people: "In the midst of pain ... there is still hope. Even though we are in a drought, the rains of hope will come."

### Looking After Our Own

Ours is a calling of service to others, but sometimes we need to remember to care for each other. Chaplain Tom Hall was one of the first Navy chaplains to respond in New York City. He was ordained a priest in New York City, served several parishes there, as well as in the Manhattan office of the Paulist Fathers where he was an administrator. Tom's network was helpful in the early days of the tragedy, but being on home turf was especially hard for him. He shares that:

*By the third day of the recovery, I learned that a body that had fallen from an upper floor of the World Trade Center killed the priest who had been my confessor during two of my civilian assignments in NYC. Father Mike Judge was chaplain to the FDNY and had gone to the WTC with his firefighters. Hours later, I learned that twenty-six of my former parishioners were also among the "missing" at Ground Zero.*

After a week of stressful ministry, Chaplain Hall wisely saw himself as one of those who needed help.

*A week following the disaster, I realized that my presence as a chaplain at the site would diminish in its effectiveness. I began to view myself as one of the casualties. My sadness and sense of horror was shutting down my own care systems. I departed Manhattan a bit conflicted. I realized intellectually that I had done everything I was capable of to provide a small mitigation to an enormous emotional wound. My emotional ties to so many that suffer made me reluctant to leave.*



(AP/Wideworld Photos)

Tom sought medical attention when he returned to Puerto Rico, but especially meaningful to him was the constant contact of another chaplain serving with the USCG who e-mailed and called regularly to see how Tom was doing. As Tom says, "Though the distance that separates us is great; his pastoral care is always near."

### Only the Beginning

Unfortunately, the work of Navy chaplains in responding to this crisis is not over. Amanda Ripley, in the October 29, 2001 issue of *TIME* magazine, reports on what the people of New York and Washington are likely to go through, based upon the experience of the survivors of the Oklahoma City bombing: half the people who were in the immediate vicinity of the destruction will develop a psychiatric disorder; a third will have post-traumatic stress

disorder; in six years, survivors and family members will still be in counseling; some will have taken their lives; others will have lost marriages and custody rights because of addictions. The work of the chaplains is just beginning.

Chaplain Barry Black and Chaplain Phil Wyrick found themselves busy on the nuclear submarine when it went on

alert status. Even in the most technologically advanced of environments, there remained a need for a human ambassador of the Divine. In reflecting on this tragedy, Chaplain Black articulates the ministry of chaplains and RPs, now and in the future, when he says:

*Both the survivors and the bereaved have—and will continue to—come to the wells of spiritual strength and consolation. Navy chaplains and RPs have stood—and will continue to stand—by these wells, offering to all that spiritual "cup of cold water" our people desperately seek, servants to all and leaders in life-transforming service. TNC*

*Chaplain Crane is currently assigned as OIC of MEFREL 122. He spent two weeks on ADT covering the Navy Chaplain response to the September 11 attacks.*

## *Chaplain Emergency Response Team (CERT)— World Trade Center*

by CDR Wilbur C. Douglass, III, CHC, USN

As I left my house at 0500 heading for the airport, I reminded my wife that I would be home on Thursday, just two days later. My flight landed in New York City at LaGuardia International Airport, where I was to catch another flight to Providence, Rhode Island. From there I would drive down to Cape Cod, Massachusetts, to meet with the USCG District One chaplains for lunch, conduct training the next day, and be home the next. Little did I know that these plans would never materialize. In fact, my journey was about to undergo a major, history-making change after I landed in LaGuardia Airport at 0730. This fateful day was to become known as “9-1-1,” and the World Trade Center would be attacked less than 90 minutes after my plane landed.

Before I could check in at the gate for my flight to Providence, I found out that all flights had been cancelled. The news of the attack spread rapidly through the airport. Soon, federal marshals were ushering all of us outside telling us that we had to evacuate the airport. Learning that the Pentagon had sustained the same horrible fate, I realized why we had to evacuate.

Right after landing in LaGuardia, I had met a Reserve Navy Chief Petty Officer on her way to Rhode Island for two weeks of training. We were scheduled for the same flight to Providence. After we made our way to the outside of the airport, we realized the magnitude of the mass hysteria. Sensing that our only option was to find a rental car, we headed for a rental agency near the airport. As we walked over the bridge that crossed the highway, we got our first view of the burning Twin Towers. A crowd gathered on the bridge as the unimaginable site caused all of us to stare in utter disbelief and

horror. The burning towers looked like two smoking cigarettes. I could not believe these were the same two magnificent architectural wonders that I had just flown over a few short hours earlier.

After renting one of the last available cars at the rental agency, we left New York via the only open bridge in the city and headed for Providence. Due to an airport mix-up, our luggage headed to Providence without us. So, our first priority was to retrieve our bags before making any further plans. I realized that plans were already made for me when I received a phone call from my command, instructing me to report directly to USCG District One to offer my services. I was well aware that this meant I was to report to the Incident Command Post (ICP) in Staten Island and begin setting up the Chaplain Emergency Response Team (CERT).

According to the latest Coast Guard Field Operations Guide (FOG), I was to report to the ICP as the CERT Technical

Specialist. These identified positions had been previously established following invaluable lessons learned from providing pastoral coverage during the recovery operations for Egypt Air Flight 990. My anxiety level was at an all time high as I began to realize the enormous task that was lying before me. Fear would not allow me to totally grasp or even imagine the arduous and challenging ministry that was about to unfold.

After retrieving my luggage from the Providence airport and acquiring more uniforms and personal items from the exchange at USCG Air Station Cape Cod, I returned to New York and arrived at USCG Activities New York, located at Fort Wadsworth, Staten Island, New York. This is where the ICP had been established immediately after the attacks.





Upon arriving at Activities New York on the evening of 12 September, I met Chaplain Gregory Todd, the Activities New York Command Chaplain, and Chaplain Dennis Boyle, one of two chaplains stationed at USCG Air Station Cape Cod. Both were in Massachusetts the day before, preparing to attend our District One chaplains meeting, and had returned to activities New York the night of 11 September. As the first two chaplains at the ICP, they began gathering the latest information about the incident and the Coast Guard response.

The first challenge I faced was to find adequate workspace for the Chaplain Emergency Response Team. Chaplain Todd agreed to let us use one of the unused rooms in the Capodanno Memorial Chapel that was undergoing renovation. They decided to delay the renovation until the CERT departed.

Next, a dedicated phone line and a computer workstation were requisitioned. Within hours, Activities New York had provided us with both. Chaplain Todd brought in furniture, easels, maps, stationary, and supplies to turn an unfinished room into an efficient working environment.

The next major challenge was to determine how many chaplains would be needed. So far, there were just three of us. Our experience with Egypt Air 990 taught us that we had to start with a minimum of four chaplains. And we knew it was better to have an overabundance rather than a shortage of chaplains. We all realized that what we were facing at the World Trade Center was far greater than what we faced with Egypt Air. I had previously worked with both Chaplains Todd and Boyle during the initial stages of the Egypt Air recovery operations. All three of us were now quite familiar with CERT setup requirements during the early hours of establishing the ICP.

The process of acquiring enough chaplains was complicated by the fact that all air flights were cancelled throughout the country for an undetermined amount of time. We were restricted to calling in only those chaplains who could drive to New York. Knowing that any chaplains joining the team would be asked to serve from eight to ten days, I planned to call chaplains from greater distances, hoping

flights would resume before we started bringing in the second wave.

The third day after the attacks, Chaplain Todd and I went down to Ground Zero. Due to strict security, we could only get as close as two blocks away from the destroyed towers, yet even that allowed us to be close enough to witness the worst disaster in American history. The smell in the air was indescribable—unlike anything I had ever experienced. The dense smoke and floating debris in the air hampered our vision and clogged our sinuses. For those without a respirator, breathing became difficult. The streets were filled with emergency equipment and members of both the police and fire departments. Various kinds of debris were scattered as far as one could see.



Although I knew what I was looking at, I could have sworn that I was standing in the middle of a World War II movie set. Despite the sounds of sirens and heavy equipment, there was an eerie sense of quiet that prevailed. It was the same quiet that one experiences in a

cemetery. The adrenaline level was very high among the rescue personnel, and their faces reflected a sad, yet determined look. I knew immediately that we needed far more than four chaplains. Our team would need at least twice that number, if not more.

After returning to Staten Island, I called Coast Guard Headquarters to check in with CAPT Leroy Gilbert, Chaplain of the Coast Guard. I asked Chaplain Gilbert the one question that determined what we would be doing for the next five weeks. We were not in a military environment. Those in charge of the emergency response were civilian, not military. Realizing this was a different kind of situation, I asked, “What is our mission here?” I needed to know where we were to concentrate our pastoral efforts.

Chaplain Gilbert’s response was that the Commandant wanted the chaplains to provide ministry wherever we could: Coast Guard members, units, cutters, NYPD, FDNY, medical personnel, volunteer

workers, Family Support Center, etc. Knowing that, we were then able to set up a schedule for the chaplains and begin calling in the appropriate number.

Within a week, our numbers increased and we began to provide ministry at Ground Zero, aboard the cutters in the harbor, and at Bayonne, New Jersey, where Coast Guard Port Security Unit 305 was staged.

During our first week, we received a call from the Stapleton Piers, on Staten Island, asking specifically for the Coast Guard chaplains to come and provide ministry to the firemen who were utilizing their facilities. The Stapleton Piers, also known as “Homeport,” were normally used as a recreation and relaxation facility for visiting naval ships. However, they were now being used as a staging area for firemen who were either heading into or returning from Ground Zero. By this time, our numbers had grown to five, with a sixth chaplain on the way.

Homeport received daily visits and the firemen looked forward to seeing the chaplains. It did not take long for us to become very familiar with the firemen as well as the volunteer staff. In fact, the first night we visited with them they requested a chaplain to come and say a prayer for those preparing to return to Ground Zero. Over a hundred firemen occupied the facilities at any one time, so we were told to expect around ten to twenty in attendance. Chaplain Dennis Boyle volunteered to return later in the evening to provide the prayer, while the other chaplains remained at the chapel to offer a three-hour prayer vigil for the personnel and families of Activities New York. Homeport had just reopened a small chapel and Chaplain Boyle prepared to use it for the small number of firemen expected. However, he was asked to take the firemen outside of the building to the parking lot instead.

The announcement was made to those in the building that a chaplain was about to offer a prayer and he proceeded to put on his vestments. When he turned around to face his “small” company, he was shocked to find that every fireman and volunteer in the building was now standing outside facing him, over one hundred persons – each with a lit lighter in their hand. All stood with great expectation

of the words he was about to offer and there was total silence as all eyes were focused on him. Chaplain Boyle realized this was a very special moment; one that he might never again face in his ministry. He offered a deep, spiritually moving, and most appropriate prayer for the firemen and all who were involved in the recovery operations. For the next several days, those few solemn moments outside were the talk of Homeport.

By the beginning of the following week, our numbers had grown to seven and we were on a roll! We had settled into a daily routine that provided us



*Chaplain Jim Jenkins speaks with members of the Armed Forces near Ground Zero in New York City.*

the opportunity to offer ministry to as many as possible. Each evening, following a long day of visiting, listening, and consoling, we gathered to debrief. This allowed each person to talk about what he or she had personally witnessed during the day, the feelings that each was presently experiencing and any lessons learned. When every person had debriefed, we set up our schedule for the next day. The places that needed to be visited were written down and the chaplains were rotated on a daily basis to cover them. This meeting usually took anywhere from an hour and a half to two hours. It did not take long for us to realize just how essential it was that we take the time each evening to debrief.

Chaplain Thomas Hall, USCG GANTSEC, San Juan, Puerto Rico, had arrived in Manhattan before September 11<sup>th</sup> to attend a Catholic retreat. Finding himself stranded in New York, he volunteered his time at the Family Support Center (FSC) offering

pastoral care and counseling to the families of the victims. Chaplain Hall worked the evening shift and remained until his return to Puerto Rico two weeks later.

After visiting the FSC, which was initially set up in a National Guard Armory in Manhattan, we found that there were more than enough volunteer ministers offering care. This meant that we could concentrate our pastoral efforts on other areas. Since the Red Cross was coordinating pastoral coverage, we decided to visit the Red Cross Headquarters to offer our services to work along side of them. We were welcomed with open arms. In fact, the Spiritual Care Department urged us to set up a Coast Guard chaplain watch in conjunction with the other volunteer Red Cross chaplains at the DMORT (Disaster Mortuary), where the remains of the victims were brought for identification.

The Medical Examiner's Office, NYPD, FDNY, Correctional Officers, Salvation Army personnel, state police, and other volunteers were all working around the clock at the DMORT. It was a highly restricted area, but we were able to walk freely throughout the area providing ministry. We covered DMORT on a daily basis.



On my first day at DMORT, I observed a motor-cycle policeman escorting each truck that brought in human remains. Each was handled with the utmost dignity. However, when the remains of a policeman or fireman were brought in, it arrived via an ambulance with a police motor-cycle escort. Both vehicles had lights and sirens on to announce their arrival. All persons in the DMORT, civilian and uniformed personnel, stood at attention and rendered a salute when the flag draped body bag was removed from the ambulance. At the sound of "Hand Salute!" everyone rendered a salute until we heard "Ready Two!"

On one of these occasions, a young fireman came out of one of the tents visibly shaken. When a police chaplain and I approached him, the young man said, "I've lost thirty of my

friends. I'm afraid that one of these times it's going to be one of them. I don't want to be here if one of them comes in here." He spoke of a fear that was shared by thousands of his co-workers.

We also covered the entire area surrounding Ground Zero. Again, this was a highly restricted area. In order to enter the area, one had to have the proper identification that the Office of Emergency Management (OEM) provided. We were told that EVERYONE, military, policemen, firemen, etc., needed this identification. So all of us received our picture ID cards. But we later found that our credibility as Coast Guard chaplains was so high it really was not necessary. In the city of New York, the Coast Guard is not seen as a military organization. Instead, both the NYPD and the FDNY view the USCG as law enforcement.

Therefore, the only identification that the Coast Guard chaplains needed to enter Ground Zero was their Coast Guard uniform and a military ID displayed in plain view. Realizing this, we modified our uniform and used our dress shirts with shoulder boards in conjunction with our working pants and steel-toed boots. The dress shirt is more recognizable than the undress uniform, so we decided to make ourselves known from a distance. By the end



*Chaplain Brian Haley speaks with a worker at Ground Zero.*



of our time, we also acquired blue windbreakers with the words "CHAPLAIN, U.S. COAST GUARD" on both the front and in big block letters on the back. These were provided from the Chaplain of the Coast Guard's Office. This uniform item allowed people to recognize us from quite a distance away.

Every person entering Ground Zero wore safety boots and a helmet. Whether or not we wore our respirator and goggles depended on the wind and the amount of debris in the air.

Some of our best ministry efforts, and most challenging conditions, were at Ground Zero. Every chaplain who joined the CERT was first taken to Ground Zero for an orientation tour. This provided the chaplain with a first-hand view of what could not be described in words or captured in pictures. Everyone who visited the devastating site stood in awe and bewilderment. All experienced a deep sadness that was often accompanied by various levels of anger. This visit also allowed the chaplain to provide ministry with the proper perspective. Chaplains walked freely throughout the area, stopping to talk with policemen, firemen, and emergency workers. In the beginning, it took an effort to engage people. Before long, they were approaching us.

By now, several waves of chaplains had served as part of the CERT, with each wave serving between eight and 14 days. As one chaplain left, another would arrive. This was the plan. I wanted to have as many chaplains as possible experience this rare opportunity to provide such a unique form of disaster ministry. This experience will prove invaluable should the need arise again in the future.

Because we were being housed at the Navy Lodge located on the grounds of Activities New York, our housing was limited. Every room was now designated for military personnel assigned to Activities New York and responding directly to the disaster. This restriction limited the number of chaplains we could bring in at one time. Our numbers were, therefore, set at no more than eight to ten chaplains at one time. This was a good working number that allowed us to cover all of the sites responding to the recovery operations, both military and civilian.

The makeup of the chaplain teams remained constant for days at a time between chaplain rotations. Because of this, we found ourselves forming strong bonds during the operation. Working

in pairs and experiencing the pain, the sadness, and the devastation together caused us to become closer than just working colleagues. We became a very close family. None of us were prepared for the strong emotions that arose in saying farewell to a departing teammate.

The first wave was the most special to me. It was this first wave of chaplains that had done the groundbreaking work in establishing the team. These dedicated pastors and professional officers had grounded the Coast Guard chaplains in the hearts of the New York emergency personnel as an essential element for the recovery operations. They provided pastoral support and care to all. When Thomasina Yuille, District One Command Chaplain, departed, followed by Dennis Boyle and Thomas Walcott, USCG Group Milwaukee, it was as if they



*Chaplain Keith Shuley and Chaplain Peter Larsen atop the pile of rubble at Ground Zero.*

were making a PCS move to a remote foreign unit. None of us had expected to bond in the manner we had. After all, we belonged to a relatively small community within the Chaplain Corps, and so despite the miles between us, we saw each other on a regular basis.

Yet, the night before a chaplain departed, we all felt saddened. Working together under such ardu-

**The “Lessons Learned” in this experience are summarized below. They were invaluable keys for our effectiveness, and will be just as useful in any future disaster. Some of them were first learned in previous recovery operations:**

- Set up an operating area within hours of being called for duty
- Acquire a desk, phone line, computer, and other essential supplies
- Ensure that at least four chaplains make up the initial team
- Acquire the services of a USCG Second Class Yeoman or a USN Second Class Religious Program Specialist
- Quickly establish the mission of the Chaplain Emergency Response Team
- Determine the number of chaplains needed and set up a rotation schedule
- For an event that has an undetermined amount of days, be prepared to rotate the same chaplains through for a second time
- Integrate the team with both active duty and Reserve chaplains
- Ensure that the COMNAVRESFOR New Orleans Chaplain is notified and aware of the processing of orders for any Reserve chaplain used for the operations
- Once the team is in operation, ensure that there is a workable schedule
- Allow for break time, days off, and exercise time
- Debrief each chaplain, every night, regardless of the time it begins
- Maintain daily communication with the senior chaplain
- As soon as possible, establish relations with the POC's for OEM, Red Cross, the Salvation Army, the local police and fire departments, emergency medical, FEMA, FBI, and any other agencies in the area.
- Maintain a daily log of activities via each chaplain's daily situation report

ous conditions, sharing our stories each night, being there as both friend and colleague providing support, and praying continuously for each other created a bond that had never been experienced on this level before. We had become a family.

Within our family, each had acquired a specific responsibility essential for the entire team. One dealt with arranging transportation for the next day. Another arranged for a boat from the Coast Guard Station to take chaplains out to visit Coast Guard cutters in the harbor. Still, another volunteered to spend the day orienting a new arrival to the team, while another ensured that each member was aware of his responsibilities and the proper meeting time and place at one of the many sites. When a chaplain departed, we had an informal “Farewell” at the conclusion of our evening meeting, complete with a departing gift of a plaque of the Capodanno Chapel (compliments of Chaplain Todd).

Keeping daily situation reports, arranging for transportation to the various sites, maintaining orders, coordinating billeting for reporting and departing chaplains, and all of the paperwork that accompanies these and other numerous tasks became a significant administrative challenge. Chaplain Derek Ross, USCG Training Center Cape May, was instrumental in getting a Reserve yeoman who had been recalled to active duty permanently assigned to the CERT. With dedicated administrative support, we now had more time to devote to our pastoral responsibilities. In addition to the Yeoman First Class, we were also assigned a Reserve Religious Program Specialist for a short time.

After the third week of providing ministry, one of the chaplains reported during our evening meeting that the New York Mayor's Office was planning to begin escorting family members from the FSC, now located at Pier 94, to a site near Ground Zero. This

would help the families to begin closure with their loved one's death. We decided that we should be on the ferries. Chaplain Don Biadog, Training Center Petaluma, California, spoke directly with the person from the NYPD Community Affairs, who was coordinating the ferry rides for the families. He convinced the department they needed the Coast Guard chaplains to be a part of the volunteers who were escorting the families. As a result, the Response Team was asked to provide two CG chaplains for each of the three ferry runs going between Pier 94 and Ground Zero. We complied and added another task to our daily log.

By now, Homeport no longer staged the firemen, allowing us to concentrate our efforts elsewhere. By the fourth week, we had a set plan of operation that also allowed for two chaplains to take one day off for each eight to ten days of duty, while still providing coverage to the CG cutters, DMORT, Ground Zero, TACLET and PSU units, and the FSC.

When the ferry runs were added, chaplains began sharing stories during the debriefing that hit all of us hard. The stories related to the chaplains by the family members, or just the experiences they had ministering to the family members, were often very hard for us to bear. Chaplain Steve Brown, District Nine Command Chaplain from Cleveland, Ohio, related how much he was affected watching Chaplain Doug Vrieland, USCG Group Charleston, South Carolina, occupy the time of a little child, which allowed the mother time to grieve the loss of her husband—the child's father. The grateful mother was finding it difficult to take care of her little one and to grieve her loss at the same time. Chaplain Vrieland was able to gain the child's trust quickly and hold a meaningful conversation with him.

The stories are endless and many will be told for years to come. The CG chaplains will be able to relate many of them to others. Yet the critical element for us was that we were there to hear them and respond to them. As difficult as it was to watch the families grieve, and hear them ask the unanswerable questions, all 30 chaplains who served on the Response Team agreed that they did not want to be anywhere else except with the families.

The ministry they provided was essential and greatly appreciated. Chaplain William Brown, USCG

District Eight, in New Orleans, related, "I've never been hugged and kissed this much in my life!"

Even though each of the chaplains serving with the CERT at the World Trade Center debriefed each night, that may not have been enough. As each chaplain departed, he or she was reminded about the importance of seeking out professional assistance for further debriefing and counseling. CREDO Norfolk provided us with a retreat to help in this matter.

In my 20 years as a Navy chaplain, this was, by far, the greatest ministry challenge I have ever experienced. The Chaplain Emergency Response Team served from 11 September through 20 October—40 days and 40 nights. In that time, a total of 30 Chaplains provided ministry to CG members and units, families of the victims, personnel from NYPD, FDNY, Medical Examiner's Staff, volunteers, construction workers, and many others. Of those 30 chaplains, 23 were active duty Navy chaplains serving with the Coast Guard, four were Reservists serving with the USCG RELSUP unit, and three were Reservists from the nearby area around New York.



This article could never tell the whole story of how each of these 30 chaplains provided timely and courageous ministry. They went right to the areas of devastation to represent the love of God to those experiencing the worst act of violence in the history of our country. To a person, they were the epitome of servant leadership. I felt it not just a privilege, but an honor, to have served with them and to have been in their company. *TNC*

*Chaplain Douglass serves as the USCG LANT AREA Chaplain.*



### **Chaplains Who Served with the Chaplain Emergency Response Team (CERT) at Ground Zero**

CAPT Leroy Gilbert, Chaplain of the Coast Guard, Washington, DC  
CAPT Thomas Murphy, USCG Academy, New London, CT  
CAPT Ronald Swafford, USCG Pacific Area, Alameda, CA  
CAPT Peter Larsen, U.S. Naval Reserve  
CDR Wilbur Douglass, USCG Atlantic Area/Fifth CG District, Portsmouth, VA  
CDR Deborah Jetter, USCG RELSUP 106 (District Nine)  
CDR Douglas Waite, Deputy Chaplain of the Coast Guard, Washington, DC  
CDR Derek Ross, USCG Training Center, Cape May, NJ  
CDR Lawrence Greenslit, USCG District Seven, Miami, FL  
CDR Steven Brown, USCG District Nine, Cleveland, OH  
CDR Richard Carrington, U.S. Naval Reserve  
CDR Michael Doyle, U.S. Naval Reserve  
LCDR Rondall Brown, USCG Air Station Cape Cod, MA  
LCDR Thomasina Yuille, USCG District One, Boston, MA  
LCDR William Brown, USCG District Eight, New Orleans, LA  
LCDR James Jensen, USCG RELSUP 106 (District Thirteen)  
LCDR Gregory Todd, USCG Activities New York, Staten Island, NY  
LCDR Manuel Biadog, USCG Training Center, Petaluma, CA  
LCDR Bryan Finch, USCG Training Center, Yorktown, VA  
LCDR Phillip Lee, USCG RELSUP 106 (District Eight)  
LCDR Thomas Hall, USCG GANTSEC, San Juan, PR  
LCDR Brian Haley, USCG Academy, New London, CT  
LCDR Dennis Boyle, USCG Air Station, Cape Cod, MA  
LT Keith Shuley, USCG Training Center, Petaluma, CA  
LT Thomas Walcott, USCG Group Milwaukee, WI  
LT James Finley, USCG Training Center, Yorktown, VA  
LT Alan Andraeas, USCG Air Station, Borinquen, PR  
LT Peter Rosa, USCG Group St. Petersburg, FL  
LT Douglas Vrieland, USCG Group Charleston, SC  
LT Stephen Bartell, USCG RELSUP 106 (District One)

## September 11<sup>th</sup>—Crisis Ministry

by CAPT Jane F. Vieira, CHC, USNR

It was a day like no other. A clear blue late summer's day. Not a cloud in the sky. Perfect temperature. The Navy Surgeon General, VADM Mike Cowan, was holding his weekly lineup with his senior staff. Suddenly, he was handed a note by CAPT Ryland Dodge, BUMED Public Affairs Officer. He looked stunned. "This is a dark day for America," he said. "The World Trade Center towers have been struck, each by a different plane, and it is believed to be a terrorist attack. This meeting is now terminated. You all have work to do. Go to your office and prepare how Navy medicine can respond."

Wordlessly, everyone rushed to his or her office. I hurried to mine and assembled my staff. We began making preparations as we tried to gather facts about the World Trade Centers from the radio. Suddenly, we heard an explosion. It sounded close. Within minutes, we learned it was the Pentagon, just a mile away. Black smoke billowed from its southwestern side. Sirens—dozens of them—began wailing. Two smaller explosions followed. A radio commentator announced that a car bomb had detonated at the State Department across the street from BUMED headquarters. (Later, we learned it was two fuselage explosions from the Boeing 757 aircraft that crashed into the Pentagon.)

All federal buildings were ordered evacuated immediately. More explosions were feared. The many streets leading to the Pentagon were closed and patrolled by police. Fighter planes circled overhead, guarding our nation's capital from further attacks.

I made my way to the National Naval Medical Center (NNMC) in Bethesda to augment the team of

chaplains and RPs awaiting mass casualties. We waited, but no casualties came. It turned out that there were more dead than wounded at the Pentagon. In the end, 74 people were rescued and sent to local burn and trauma centers. While we waited,



(AP/Wideworld Photos)

preparations were made to deploy the hospital ship USNS COMFORT (T-AH 20) to New York City to assist local trauma centers. Within hours of the attacks, the COMFORT got underway and headed for a rescue and recovery mission in lower Manhattan.



police and recovery workers at the World Trade Center site.

By evening on September 11<sup>th</sup>, dozens of active duty, Reserve and retired Navy chaplains in the

LCDR Salvador Aguilera and LT David Stroud, chaplains from NNMC Bethesda, were on board. For the next 20 days, they provided a ministry of crisis intervention and pastoral presence to hundreds of exhausted firefighters,

Washington, DC area were reporting to the Navy Chief of Chaplains Office in the Navy Annex, overlooking the Pentagon. From there, they were transported to the Washington Navy Yard, where they joined 46 Casualty Assistance Calls Officers (CACOs) to make 46 death or missing person notifications. These teams would not return from their painful missions into the Maryland and Virginia suburbs and the District of Columbia until well past midnight. And this was only the beginning.

I was one of six chaplains designated to stand the night shift at the Pentagon disaster site. We reported to the Chaplain Operations tent directly in front of the blast site. There Chaplain Randy Cash and I were assigned to the inner courtyard. Throughout the night, Chaplain Cash and I provided crisis intervention and ministry of presence to firefighters, emergency rescue teams and recovery workers.

"It was a sticky fire," the firefighters said, "burning deep in the rubble. Hard to extinguish." They had never seen a building as solidly built as the Pentagon. It was compartmentalized like a ship and made as solid as pure granite. This large jet plane traveling at 345 miles per hour only penetrated the outer three of five rings. The inner two remained intact, and the damage was localized as they had never seen before.

"Did the people suffer?" we wondered. The firefighters speculated that the passengers in the plane and those in the immediate area of impact met their deaths instantly. "Faster than you can blink," they said. The force of the impact and the heat of the explosion would have made for a quick death. At that moment, this knowledge was comforting. The ones who suffered were those on the periphery, those in the immediate vicinity caught by the edges of the explosion. Among these were the 74 patients transferred to local burn and trauma units.

For the next several days, the Pentagon was my place of ministry. Chaplains working at the Pentagon disaster site served in various capacities. We worked with recovery teams, at the mortuary, in the decontamination tent and in the Chaplain Operations tent providing pastoral support, critical incident stress defusing and prayer. Three chaplains served

with each recovery team recovering human remains from the wreckage. Each body we recovered received three blessings from three chaplains. Since most bodies were charred beyond recognition and some were just body parts, we didn't know whom we were praying for. Later I thought to myself we might even have blessed the terrorists. All the dead were treated with the same dignity and honor.

Chaplains were present for two reasons. First, we wanted to provide that proper dignity and honor to our dead. Chaplains of different faiths provided different blessings. We didn't know who the deceased were, or what faith they had embraced in life, but we provided a quiet, dignified prayer that would give honor to the person we were holding and treat their remains as sacred. Second, we were there to provide moral support to the people in-



involved in the recovery efforts. As we worked with the recovery team members, they lifted the bodies and carried them into the refrigerator truck, and they drew strength from seeing that a chaplain was with them.

I went back to the Pentagon on succeeding days wearing camouflage utilities, which had been established as the required uniform, and worked jointly with Army and Air Force chaplains. Never in my life did I ever imagine I'd be wearing camouflage utilities as part of my job as the BUMED Chaplain in Washington, DC. But then, never did I ever imagine Air Force fighter planes would be patrolling the skies over our nation's capital on alert for more commercial airliners turned into missiles by hijackers.



On one occasion I was assigned to the decontamination tent where the recovery teams, firefighters and FBI workers were emerging from the wreckage and had to be washed down to prevent disease. Ministry here involved talking with them as they came out. I actually set up a little customer service counter and had all the things they needed all laid out. Everybody started coming to my table. They would come up and I would say, "How can I serve you? What can I get for you?" The recovery workers allowed me to minister to them in simple ways, by opening up a handy-wipe package or handing them a tissue or baby wipe used to clean masks. These small things caused them to open up and share what they were going through. I believe they felt served and cared for in these simple acts. Hence, recovery workers, firefighters, FBI agents and demolition workers began flocking to this customer service table to get their masks cleaned, allowing me to take care of them and minister to them, resulting in a significant opportunity for ministry throughout the day. Some asked me to pray with them.

Working beside chaplains of other faiths and other branches of service providing ministry at such a critical moment in our nation's history was a tremendous experience and a great honor. Reflecting on this experience, I believe we have hardly begun to realize the magnitude of this tragedy. It is a turning point for our country, not only in terms of being prepared for the unexpected, but also in

terms of our psychological preparedness. We were not prepared for this unexpected event psychologically, and in other ways we have lost our naiveté as a nation. However, I truly believe our Nation will not only come through this, but will come through stronger and wiser, more compassionate, with a sense of justice and equality, and a unity in diversity we have not known before.

As much as it has been a tragedy, it has also been a significant teaching moment for our country, causing us to reaffirm our values and priorities. Our country is not represented by buildings, whether the World Trade Center or the Pentagon. People who don't understand America might think these financial and military symbols are America's god, but they are not. Our God is revealed in the spirit represented in people of heroic proportions, in their goodness, love, compassion and respect for differences. This spirit is perfectly exemplified in firefighters who ran into burning, crumbling buildings without considering the color, race or creed of the people they were determined to save. It's in the rescue and recovery workers at the Pentagon who went in and pulled people to safety from under burning desks and out from burning rooms, through toxic fumes and smoke. And finally, it's in the tremendous outpouring of the American people responding to this tragedy with generosity and deep resolve. This is the spirit and foundation of America. *TNC*

*CAPT Jane F. Vieira, CHC, USN is Special Assistant for Pastoral Care, Bureau of Medicine and Surgery, Washington, DC*



## *Crisis Ministry—CACO Team and Family Assistance Center*

by LCDR Brad Telleen, CHC, USN



I will never forget where I was the morning of September 11, 2001, or the memory of watching black smoke rise from the Pentagon as it burned across the Potomac. When the day began, little did I imagine I would be called to the Navy Chief of Chaplains office later that night to begin the grim and difficult task of notifying family members that their loved one was not accounted for after the crash of an American Airlines jetliner into the southwest side of the Pentagon earlier that day. CACO (Casualty Assistance Calls Officer) calls are always very difficult, but the fact that so many had died and that so many in our military and civilian community were affected was numbing.

Once mustered at the Chief of Chaplains office, we were moved as needed to Naval District Washington (NDW) headquarters where we were each assigned to a CACO team. Each team consisted of a CACO officer, a command representative, a chaplain and a driver. The cooperation and teamwork of the many different players who organized and cared in the midst of a very difficult task impressed me deeply. Quick notification was the Navy's goal due to the desire to make an official contact with family members before the media began knocking on their doors.

Before departure from NDW, CACO teams were briefed by a Public Affairs Officer on how to work with the media if we encountered them, and by a legal officer on how to answer questions and clarify areas of uncertainty. Unlike other CACO calls I have been involved in, every chaplain I spoke to found that the family knew what had happened and expected the CACO call. The family reactions I encountered were cautious hopefulness, while other chaplains encountered numbness, disbelief and even rage.

Following my days assigned to a CACO team, I volunteered to serve at the DOD Joint Family Assistance Center (JFAC) located at the Sheraton Hotel in the Crystal City area of Arlington, Virginia, five minutes from the Pentagon. I had heard the center was the hub of family support and resources for the disaster. That was an understatement. When I arrived at the center, I was greeted at the front door by personnel assigned to direct family mem-

bers to the check-in table on the second deck, where they were logged in and their immediate needs assessed. Once that was done, they were either directed or personally escorted to the locations where their needs could be immediately addressed.

The JFAC was set up as a "One Stop Shopping" site, which it was in every sense. Whatever family members needed as far as guidance, comfort and counsel was concerned could be found there, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The Center provided many essential resources for family members, such as chaplains, counselors, benefits and compensation advisors for both military and civilians, financial, legal and lodging assistance; the American Red Cross, Salvation Army, Stress and Love Dogs provided by Therapy Dogs International; American Airlines representatives, Social Security, insurance representatives, "Comfort Quilts" for the little children who lost a parent, phone banks manned by counselors and many other resources.

The Center's director, Army Lt. Gen. John Van Alstyne, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Personnel Policy, led two daily briefings which kept grieving family members and staff manning the Center informed of the latest news and decisions from the Pentagon recovery site. Enough cannot be said about the sensitive, direct and honest manner in which Lt. Gen. Van Alstyne led the daily briefings, met one on one with family members, and set the tone in the Center as a safe place to come for help and to grieve.

Working with fellow chaplains from the Army and Air Force provided a great sense of professional encouragement. I was inspired that, no matter what our service or faith background, we all shared the same commitment to the pastoral care of the grieving families and staff members working at the Center. Active duty or Reserve, it did not matter; we were all chaplains with one goal: comfort the grief stricken and broken hearted.

I will never be the same. September 11<sup>th</sup> changed the way I view ministry, joint pastoral operations and the hugs of my wife and daughters.

*Chaplain Telleen serves as the Deputy Special Assistant for Pastoral Care, Bureau of Medicine and Surgery*

## *Casualty Assistance Call: Moment of Crisis, Moment of Faith*

by LT David R. Glassmire, CHC, USNR



Before 11 September, my experience with the Navy Casualty Assistance Calls Program was limited. Occasionally, the Reserve Center executive officer would call my rectory asking for “Chaplain Glassmire.” Once the secretary had figured out who he was looking for, she would patch him through. “This is Chaplain Glassmire speaking, how may I help you, sir?” “Chaplain,” the XO would say, “we have a CACO.” Usually, there would be silence at my end of the line. I would inwardly cringe, and then respond, “Aye, aye, sir, where can I meet you?”

The only formal Casualty Assistance Calls Officer (CACO) training I had was in the Basic Course at Chaplain’s School. It was half a day long, if that. Now I was wishing I had either paid more attention to the training provided, or that I had received more training to begin with. A little knowledge is a dangerous thing, but misinformation can be disastrous, especially in the midst of a crisis. A poorly handled notification can make the devastating news even more painful for the family and for the other military personnel assigned to the command of the deceased as well. Giving tragic news is one of the hardest jobs in the military. It is something few can get used to and none should take for granted. Being prepared can reduce the tension of the situation to some degree. One thing is certain; a chaplain is an indispensable part of the CACO team. On 9 September, 45 chaplains endorsed by the Roman Catholic Archdiocese for the Military Services, U.S.A., converged at the Washington Retreat House for their annual four-day convocation. It was to be a reunion of sorts, active duty and Reserve brothers brought together to speak about vocations, finances, and the state of the military archdiocese. The morning of 11 September changed all that.

As we prepared for the morning briefing, one of our auxiliary bishops, the Most Reverend John J. Kaising, entered the room. He stood before us somberly and said, “America has suffered from a most heinous act. The World Trade Center in New York City has just been attacked.” I thought to myself, “This can’t be so; this is a war-gaming scenario the bishop is portraying. It can’t be true.”

The Bishop clicked on the television and tuned to CNN’s live coverage of the event. We sat in shock and disbelief, glued to the set, some more visibly distraught than others.

One of the twin towers was in flames. Chaos reigned on the streets of lower Manhattan. Twenty minutes later, the second tower was hit by another plane and within ninety minutes, the World Trade Center towers crashed to the ground, killing thousands. And the terror was not over.

One hour and twenty minutes after the attack on New York began, a third plane crashed into the western side of the Pentagon. The news of this incident sent chaplains flying out of the conference room. Some made calls, others immediately left for the Pentagon to assist in the unfolding mass casualty response, and some sat with hands folded in prayer.

Within one hour, active duty and Reserve chaplains were on the scene, providing support. They were met by Marine chaplain assistants, Navy



*(U.S. Marine Corps photo by Cpl. J. Ingersoll)*

Religious Program Specialists and Army and Air Force chaplains service support personnel to help in the triage process, comfort the dying, administer the sacraments and pray with those overcome by the smoke, heat, fire, and horror of this calamity.



On 12 September, the room where we had met the day before was one-third empty. Active duty chaplains had mobilized. CNN displayed “America Under Siege” across the screen. Air travel around the country was suspended. Reagan National Airport – CLOSED! Dulles International Airport – CLOSED! Baltimore Washington International – CLOSED! There was nowhere to go. I had to do something. I needed to respond; there were people in need. That evening I phoned the Naval Reserve Center Buffalo commanding officer and requested orders in support of the Pentagon recovery operation.

On Friday, 14 September, I reported to the Navy Annex, to the Chief of Chaplains’ Office, for assignment. That day, I went from office to office doing a “deck plate” walk-about. This brought some comfort to those who had returned to work in the days immediately following the attack. Our mission was to assess, comfort, and listen to our beleaguered Navy family affected by the blast.

That afternoon, I was sent to the Pentagon to assist in no less than three memorial services, with a makeshift fourth service conducted in the hallway outside a Pentagon auditorium. Each of these thirty-minute services was filled to capacity with a standing-room-only crowd—a tribute to fallen comrades, and a further indication of just how much our people were struggling to cope with this incomprehensible loss. Following these services, I offered Mass with the regular contract priest, a Dominican monk, Fr. Aaron Joseph Cote and the former Air Force Chief of Chaplains, Major General Bill Dendinger. That afternoon, 350 people came together to celebrate the Eucharist.

Later that same afternoon, things would take a radical shift as needs were reassessed and addressed with the assets the Navy had onboard. I was asked to stand by as part of a CACO support team destined to make a notification at the home of one of our unaccounted-for Sailors. Eventually, I reported to CAPT Gene Theriot, the Command Chaplain for Naval District Washington (NDW), to support the process of case management and detailing of chaplains to the CACO teams for follow-up, change-of-status notifications. The primary components of the notification process are:

1. Assign the Casualty Assistance Calls Officer (CACO).
2. Identify the supporting chaplain.

3. Obtain a duty driver and vehicle.

4. Verify the Primary Next of Kin (PNOK) address with the CACO/FHS Coordinator.

5. Identify the Command Representative.

6. Receive a brief by the CACO/FHS Coordinator prior to notification.

Throughout this process, one challenge was maintaining continuity in the CACO/chaplain team. Difficulties were sometimes encountered because the chaplains who were first-responders were not necessarily available to take part in the follow-up process.

A mass casualty places another complicating factor in the CACO plan; namely, time. A CACO usually completes most of his assignment within a few weeks. The events of 11 September prolonged this process and introduced unprecedented new elements.

One hundred twenty-five people were lost at the Pentagon, 55 of whom were Navy related. In addition to the standard notification of the active duty servicemembers’ families, we provided a one-time courtesy notification to families of all Navy-related casualties, whether they had been inside the Pentagon or traveling on the plane that crashed into it. Navy-related casualties included retired Navy personnel, Department of the Navy contractors, and relatives of active duty Navy personnel. Though an initial contact was made with each family as soon as possible, final notification could not be made until a positive identification was established by Navy Mortuary Affairs at Dover, Delaware. This process sometimes took weeks, depending on the forensic evidence found at the scene.

When changes in status were determined, they often produced a flurry of activity in the CACO Command Center. Phones rang off the hook, CACOs were called, chaplains were assigned and teams went forth. Everyone pitched in to assist us in this crucial CACO process. The area chaplains were extremely responsive. Chaplains Theriot and Christopher Bennett, Staff Chaplain, Naval District Washington, took the lead in coordinating the initial wave of chaplain responses.

The CACO Command Center was established within 24 hours of the Pentagon attack, at the Washington Navy Yard, under the direction of Mr. Frank Klem, NDW Ceremonies and Protocol Spe-

cialist, who worked with Mr. Gilbert Elliot from the NDW South Operations Office. HMCM Gwen Wallmark, the Navy Mobilization Processing Coordinator/Local Area Coordinator for Mobilization (NMPS/LACMOB) staffed the personnel effort. Ms. Barbara MacDonald, the CACO Coordinator for the NDW Region, coordinated the day-to-day efforts of the CACO Command Center Watch Team, the CACOs, their supporting chaplains, and the follow-on tasking.

For two days immediately following the incident, the efforts to support the mass casualty response operated out of existing administrative space. It quickly became evident that the space was inadequate due to ever expanding requirements and new taskings. During the two weeks immediately following the attack, 103 Sailors and civilians passed through the CACO operations center, serving as caseworkers, managers, IT support personnel, drivers and shift supervisors.

I joined the team on the morning of 16 September. I immediately identified needs and we set up a dedicated phone line, chaplain's desk, computer with online access and a resource center with Bibles, prayer cards, phone numbers, and daily reports, along with CACO training information. Daily prayer was conducted at shift change. I provided the NDW CACO Web Page information of a spiritual, religious, and emotional support nature. We created a spreadsheet, which tracked chaplains, CACOs and command representatives. A daily sitrep was prepared for the morning brief with the Chief of Chaplains as to casualty status, funeral and memorial services, and religious preference for all Navy cases.

Initially, there were 41 chaplains (of whom 13 were Reservists) assigned to what grew to be 55 cases. Forty-seven of these became the responsibility of NDW. Chaplains Irving Elson, Robert Keane, Timothy Koester and Harold Caserta responded from the Naval Academy at Annapolis. Chaplains Margaret Kibben and John Lyle drove up from Marine Base Quantico to assist. Chaplain Gregory Cathcart reported from Marine Barracks, Eighth and I. Our capable RP personnel responded as well. RP2 (SW/FMF) Terry Burrell and RPSN Ann Howell managed office assets and kept up with the daily office routine. They assisted the chaplains with ceremonial support, maintained the coffee mess and just kept us in the right place at the right time while functioning with very little sleep.

The night of the attack, Chaplain Bennett and RP2 Burrell had all the chaplains mobilized and out on CACO visits. At the direction of the Chief of Naval Personnel, and contrary to normal procedures, notifications continued throughout the night, with the last team returning to the NDW office around 3:30 A.M. A round-the-clock watch bill for the CACO Center was instituted for the first 30 days. We reported to work in staggered shifts to ensure coverage throughout the night.

A spouse or family member's response to notification of such a traumatic event is never predictable. When human emotions are involved, there is no telling whether someone will be overcome by grief or quietly accept the news. The Pentagon incident proved no different, as the news of loss evoked anger, rage, pain, tears, silence, and fear. And it provoked an onslaught of unanswered questions: "Where?" "When?" "How?" But most of all, "WHY?" Then came this question, "Where was God?" The CACO teams found themselves in the midst of this turbulent milieu.

The chief task of the chaplain is to be an abiding presence when someone's world is torn by pain and grief—to listen, to pray, and to console. The chaplain is called to serve not just the family, but the CACO and the Command Representative as well. (The Command Representative was a new addition to the traditional CACO team, to assist the CACO and be the liaison between the missing person's command and his or her family.)

During many notification trips, there proved to be ample opportunity to respond to the stress and fears of many CACOs. Conversations en route to and from the notification often addressed matters of faith and personal crisis in the life of the CACO, matters of death and dying, the place of prayer in the notification process, and how to sense people's needs during a crisis. Questions would arise such as, "Chaplain, I've never done this before, it's my first time and I'm scared to death—what do I say? How should I respond?" Sometimes even, "Chaplain, will you make the notification?" Gulp!

I found the Command Representatives who accompanied my CACO teams to be of great benefit to both the CACO and to me. This was especially true if he or she knew the servicemember or civilian casualty. A good Command Representative helped to ease the awkwardness by offering appropriate anecdotes, or by contributing useful information that

would otherwise have been left unsaid at the time of notification.

As the process continued, Chaplain Theriot and I were in constant contact with the Chief of Chaplains Office through Chaplain Paul Steel, who coordinated the daily and weekly duty assignments of Reserve chaplains called into service in the National Capitol Region. The chaplains supporting CACOs were sometimes sent from the Navy Annex. At other times, they met up with their CACOs at NDW. And sometimes, they met offsite before going to the home of the PNOK.

The Navy is appropriately sensitive to quality of life issues. In the arena of human emotions, this spills over into interpersonal communications and the sensitivity shown to our families during this tragedy. The wishes of the PNOK were respected: if they desired a phone call prior to visitation, they got one. Follow-up calls were not made at all hours of the night. Courtesy CACOs were assigned to family members in need. It was vitally important to maintain support structures for these families in crisis. We

wanted to do the right thing by our families. And the term “family” was broadly defined to include relatives and friends of the immediate family. The Navy assumed support responsibility for families of Navy-related civilian casualties, “caring for our own.” They were part of our extended family. We reached out to console and care for those in greatest need by virtue of their relationship to the Navy.

From the onset of this crisis, chaplains, RPs and their civilian support staff were deeply involved. Many chaplains conducted funeral or memorial services, graveside committals, grief counseling and critical incident stress debriefings as a result of their initial CACO visits. The CACO process had to adjust and fine-tune itself to tremendous complexity and incredible loss. Despite these difficulties, the victims’ families were cared for in the most compassionate and professional manner I have ever witnessed.

And the ministry continues. *TNC*



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## *Being Present in the Moment*

by LCDR Sal Aguilera, USNR



Each of us experience moments which define our faith and give us the energy to continue in our ministry. I was privileged to serve my country by being a member of the crew of USNS COMFORT (T-AH 20) during the rescue efforts in New York City immediately after the 11 September terrorist attacks.

On the morning of 11 September, what will probably be the most memorable historical moment in my lifetime happened—the bombing of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Early that afternoon, as the Command Chaplain on USNS Comfort (T-AH 20), I was given notice to stand ready to deploy. Later that evening as I packed, I was struck with the many conflicting emotions I was experiencing. Since the morning, every chance I could, I tried to catch a glimpse of CNN. The film footage was so surreal; it was as if I was watching a Tom Clancy or Nelson DeMille suspense novel played out in real life. With each article I placed in my seabag, I wondered whom I was going to provide ministry and service to. I prayed that there would be survivors, but with each replay of the explosions it appeared that a miracle would be required for anyone to survive. I struggled here because if anyone should be expecting miracles, I, the Roman Catholic priest, should be the one. I also struggled with a sense of leaving my own as I watched the footage from the Pentagon. These were the military personnel I had thought of as my “parishioners,” and yet I was being sent to minister to others in a distant city.

There was a sense of anxiety and of wondering if I was fully prepared for what was awaiting me. But foremost was an overwhelming jumble of emotions: gratitude, pride, humility, anger, sorrow, and awe. I was grateful that all those I loved were safe. I was proud of being a member of the U.S. Navy and able to serve. I was humbled by the bravery of the rescue workers and came to realize they were “my own.” I was angry that this had happened to my country. I was sorry for all those who had lost someone they loved and for those who must wait to find out if someone they loved was gone. And I was awed by the response of the American people, by

President Bush, by all the members our government and, most of all, by the rescue teams.

I left the National Naval Medical Center (NNMC) Bethesda eager to be of service, but also very anxious about what I would find. USNS COMFORT left Baltimore Harbor with 100 personnel believing her mission was primarily to provide tangible medical services. Five hundred additional personnel boarded USNS COMFORT when we stopped in New Jersey, on 14 September. Within an hour, 450 of these boarded buses to return to their normal duty stations. What started out as a mission to provide



medical assistance utilizing the skills of over 600 military personnel quickly turned into a mission to provide comfort and relief to the rescue workers with a core group of 150 military personnel. We pulled into New York Harbor knowing we would be providing comfort and support to the New York City firefighters, policemen, and other emergency personnel, as well as to volunteers who came from all over the world. While there would be some medical services performed, the overwhelming majority of relief provided was to tired bodies and spirits. These services were not so easily prescribed as there was no way to triage those that needed help.

Having just completed a year of CPE (Clinical Pastoral Education) I was taken aback by how many of the skills I had worked at acquiring or strengthening during this year proved to be integral

to my being able to minister to those I was serving during this national crisis.

Throughout that year, I had focused on the expression “being present in the moment,” yet I was never tested so strongly as I was during the days following the events of 11 September.

Initially I found myself in the role of cheerleader as the first days were spent encouraging the crew to hang in there as we performed duties different than what we had been originally prepared to carry out. Everyone had to be flexible and innovative in order to provide the services that were needed. As the “new kids on the block,” it took time for the rescue crews to become aware of our presence. My paramount mission became taking care of the crew so they could take care of the rescue workers.

I had to be “present in the moment.” If I were thinking about what my homily was going to be for Mass, I would miss an opportunity to listen to someone who was in desperate need of a sounding board. Once the rescue workers began to arrive, they were so completely focused on what they were doing that they gave little thought to their own needs. It was up to USNS COMFORT crew to recognize opportunities to provide respite and relief. I have never seen the strength of the human spirit displayed as I saw it in these workers and our crew. One rescue worker tested this ability to respond when he arrived with his rescue dog. We had made no accommodations for animals, but the USNS COMFORT crew responded by finding a separate stateroom for the worker and his dog.

These animals served with the same dedication as their masters and, as the news reported, the animals were discouraged at not finding anyone alive. By providing the separate stateroom, we enabled the rescue dog to stay with his master and both to rest peacefully.



My ministry to the rescue workers was initially of a more formal nature. Religious services were critical to provide the respite needed for the workers to go on. They didn't want to stop to “talk” about what they were experiencing, but by participating in Mass and services held on USNS COMFORT, they found the healing comfort of

Our Father to allow them to continue in the Herculean task they faced.

On Saturday, 15 September I was honored to be escorted to Ground Zero by the Deputy Mayor of New York and his staff. When I saw it on TV, I thought it was overwhelming. When I saw it in person, it was horrific. Later that week, I was



*Chaplain Aguilera at Ground Zero.*

surprised when a forensic pathologist from the New York City Coroner's Office contacted me. I am not sure how he became aware of my presence, but I was asked to assist at the morgue in blessing the body parts of the dead. Because many of the firefighters and police asked for a blessing before leaving the morgue, I began carrying religious medals in my pocket to distribute as part of these blessings. Off of Chambers Street, I came

across six firefighters who were taking a break and having a warm meal. My heart went out to one in particular. I had deliberately been trying to give

them their space and not disturb them while they ate. He realized I was a chaplain and suddenly he struck up a conversation. He approached me and for 20 minutes he talked non-stop about anything but the work he was facing. Then as if he had run out of things to say, he paused abruptly, looked at his co-workers and said "I guess we better get back." He realized what his job was and after a much too short rest, he needed to go back to his duty. "Before you go back in, would you like a blessing?" I asked. They all responded "Most definitely!" Huddling around me, they spontaneously removed their hard hats and bowed their heads. I led them in prayer and blessed each individually. Remembering I had medals in my shirt pocket I gave each of them one. The firefighters returned to their work, with the medals reverently clutched in their hands.

Throughout my year of CPE, I diligently worked on my prayer style, trying to incorporate more spontaneity and relying less on the memorized prayers from my childhood. During this period, I came to be grateful for both. At times, personal discussions with Almighty God were called for in the form of informal prayer and at other times the "Lord's Prayer" brought the greatest comfort and allowed those who had not participated in organized religion recently to find comfort in the familiar.

Even in the midst of these tragic events, on Sunday, 23 September, my personal faith in mankind was strengthened as I participated in *A Prayer for America* at Yankee Stadium. Never before have I seen the spirit of ecumenism that I saw displayed that Sunday. Diversity is what makes the United States great, but it has also, at times, divided us. On 23 September, I saw diversity as a very strong unification factor. The patience, respect and reverence displayed on a very warm Sunday afternoon at an event that went on for over three hours, is true testimony to the presence of God in this nightmare. It will be a spiritual event I will long remember.

During this deployment, each time I was able to serve, I was overwhelmed by the commitment of these workers. But it became obvious that the workers, when they wanted to talk, wanted to talk about their loved ones and the future and not focus on those who were lost. One firefighter I spoke with had not been in touch with his family in over 48 hours. He was concerned that his family was worried about him as so many of the initial rescue workers

were lost in the first response to the attack. A small thing such as offering him the use of the cell phone I had been provided (by the generosity of Nextel) made the difference between his being able to return to what he was doing with complete focus or being distracted and potentially injuring himself or others.

In addition to this ministry, I was able to offer Catholic Mass daily. Other faith groups' religious services were held daily as well. While USNS COMFORT's chaplains normally minister to the crew and patients, Chaplain David Stroud, RP2 Rucker, and I now ministered to thousands of rescue workers and the deceased from the bombings. USNS COMFORT's Chapel was opened 24 hours a day so the crew and visitors always had a place to go to worship. Part of this formal practice for me included a Memorial Mass, on Sunday, 16 September for all of the emergency workers lost in the first response. I was able to offer Mass on Pier 92 in Manhattan. Again, I was humbled as the workers began to gather. Over 250 of their own had been lost, and yet they continued to use every ounce of energy they could muster to look for survivors.

As I write this, back on duty at the National Naval Medical Center, a part of me remains with those who continue the rescue efforts. In the weeks and months and years to come, we will all return to "normal." Yet the displays of faith that I saw while serving in New York City will remain with me forever. Rabbi Harold Kushner, who wrote *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, has written a new book entitled, *Living a Life that Matters*. Towards the end of this book, he says "When Martin Buber, the great Jewish philosopher and theologian, was asked 'Where is God?' he was wise enough not to give the cliché answers: 'God is everywhere; God is found in churches and synagogues.' Buber would answer that God is found in relationships. God is not found in people; God is found between people. When you and I are truly attuned to each other, God comes down and fills the space between us so that we are connected, not separated."

Over and over in the past weeks, I have seen God between people. I have seen that the smallest gesture can mean a great deal and that each one of us can make a difference to the betterment of the world in which we live. I am still experiencing feelings of gratitude, pride, humility, anger, sorrow, and awe. I hope I continue to feel this way for a long time. As



would be expected in a crisis such as this, I have a renewed appreciation for all those wonderful people in my life whom I love and who love me. I am even prouder to be part of the U.S. Navy and to be an American. My humility at having served those who saw the worst this world has had to offer will push me to continue to serve and find ways to make a positive difference in this world. I am still very angry, but I can also see that there is tremendous good that will come from this horrific human act. God is being found between people all over the world

because of the terrorists. The terrorists thought they would bring us to our knees, but they did not count on our getting back up again. My sorrow has only grown for those left behind and yet my awe is deepened because of the love, commitment and dedication I saw demonstrated by the crew of USNS COMFORT and all those participating in the rescue efforts in New York. *TNC*

*Chaplain Aguilera is assigned to the National Naval Medical Center at Bethesda, MD and served as Command Chaplain aboard USNS COMFORT.*

## *The Navy Chaplain*

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Special Edition—December 2001